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COLLEGE ENGLISH DEPARTMENTS AND PROFESSIONAL EFFORTS TO IMPROVE ENGLISH TEACHING.

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FOR WANT OF LEADERSHIP OR CONCERN COLLEGE ENGLISH DEPARTMENTS HAVE PERMITTED HALF OF THE NATION'S ENGLISH CLASSES TO BE TAUGHT BY TEACHERS WITHOUT ENGLISH MAJORS AND HAVE GRADUATED VAST NUMBERS OF COLLEGE ENGLISH MAJORS PLANNING TO TEACH WITH LITTLE OR NO PREPARATION IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE OR COMPOSITION. IN ADDITION, THE DEPARTMENTS OFTEN HAVE BEEN UNWILLING TO ASSIST THE SCHOOLS IN EVALUATING OR PLANNING CURRICULAR AND TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS. NEEDED CURRICULUM REFORM AND IMPROVED QUALITY OF TEACHING WILL OCCUR ONLY AS SPECIALISTS IN COLLEGE ENGLISH LEARN TO WORK LOCALLY AND NATIONALLY WITH ALL INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS THAT INFLUENCE THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH--ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY TEACHERS OF ENGLISH, ADMINISTRATORS OR EDUCATION GENERALISTS, SUPERVISORS, SPECIALISTS IN SOME ASPECT OF TEACHING ENGLISH, AND ENGLISH EDUCATION SPECIALISTS. THERE WILL BE PROBLEMS IN BRINGING TOGETHER COLLEGE ENGLISH AND COLLEGE EDUCATION, BUT THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENTS SHOULD EXAMINE THE QUALITY OF THE LEADERSHIP THEY HAVE PROVIDED BEFORE CRITICIZING PROFESSIONAL WORKERS IN OTHER FIELDS. THE RESPONSE OF COLLEGE ENGLISH DEPARTMENTS, AND PARTICULARLY THE CHAIRMEN, TO THE PRESENT CRISIS IN ENGLISH TEACHING WILL DETERMINE THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF THE ENGLISH CURRICULUM. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "THE SITUATION OF ENGLISH, 1963," PUBLISHED BY THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION, NEW YORK, 1963, PAGES 36-38. (BN)

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COLLEGE ENGLISH DEPARTMENTS AND PROFESSIONAL EFFORTS TO IMPROVE ENGLISH TEACHING*

By James R. Squire, *Executive Secretary, National Council of Teachers of English*

JEROME K. BRUNER, the distinguished psychologist from Harvard who may presently be influencing American education more deeply than any other individual, recently asserted that this country is embarked on a permanent revolution in education based on a broad redefinition of the nature of the educational profession. This revolution in the educational Establishment is symbolized, says Bruner, by the presence of Nobel laureates in physics devoting their talents and energies to the devising of school curricula in science. Underlying the revolution is the assumption that "those who know a subject most deeply know best the great and simple structuring ideas in terms of which instruction must proceed."[1]

Now whatever we think about Mr. Bruner's own theories of teaching and learning, we must concede, I think, that many recent advances in the teaching of science, the teaching of mathematics, and the teaching of the modern languages have resulted from the recognition by great numbers of scholars that part and parcel of their broad responsibility to their subject is the assumption of some measure of responsibility for the teaching of the subject at all educational levels. The past decade has seen the leaders of these other disciplines learning to work closely and well with colleagues in education and psychology, learning to work shoulder to shoulder with teachers in the schools, devising new curricula, preparing new materials, introducing new approaches to instruction.

Is this beginning to happen in English? Certainly some farsighted scholars in language and literature have long worked to improve instruction. But insofar as the teaching of English is concerned, their leadership on the national scene has not until recently been emulated by the rank and file of college English professors on many campuses throughout the country, where not infrequent breakdowns in cooperation—indeed breakdowns in communication and even in goodwill—between college English, college education, and the schools work to our permanent disadvantage. For want of leadership or want of concern, we in English have permitted half of the nation's English classes to be taught by teachers without majors in our subject. For want of leadership or want of concern, we have graduated from departments of English vast numbers of college majors planning to teach who have had little or no preparation in the English language or in composition and often inadequate preparation in literature. For want of leadership or want of concern, we too often have been unwilling to assist the schools in evaluating curricula, in planning programs, or in providing for the continuing education of teachers of English.

I accept Jerome Bruner's assumption that he who knows a subject most deeply knows best the great and simple structuring ideas around which a curriculum may be organized. I believe that basic insights into the nature of language, literature, and composition must emerge from the study of informed scholars. And I rejoice in the possibility that the new interest of college English departments in the teaching of English may lead to revolutionary changes in the educational enterprise as predicted by Mr. Bruner.

But I know, too, that the identification of the great and simple structuring ideas is only the beginning of curricular reform. Whatever the content of English on which we are able to agree, this content must be linked to learning and to teaching if it is to permanently affect our schools. And such links will occur only as specialists in college English, like those in mathematics, science, and modern languages before them, learn to work respectfully and continually with specialists on teaching, administration, and curriculum who are devoting *all* of their professional careers to improving instruction at regional and national levels.

It is not enough for a department to issue a bulletin on "what the colleges want" and settle back to wait for expected changes. It is not enough to offer a single summer institute for teachers or a single two-day conference and assume that the department's obligations have been discharged for that academic year. It is not enough to appoint a single departmental specialist in the teaching of English and assign to him all of the work involving articulation with schools or with other university departments.

Important as these steps must be in any insti-

* An address given at the Conference of Chairmen of English Departments, Washington, D.C., 29 December 1963.

[1] Jerome Bruner, "The New Educational Technology," *The American Behavioral Scientist*, VI (November 1962), 5.

tution, they are not in the long run a substitute for day-by-day concern and leadership on the part of key members of many college departments, a concern which must be as sincere and as basic as that which we habitually devote to the functions of departments which seem the most central, such as to the nature of our graduate programs or to provisions for encouraging scholarship. Not until the teaching of English really receives attention of this quality by leaders within our departments can we honestly say it is more than a stepchild, an appendage which we cannot forget but do not really choose to accept. Whether it ever receives such basic attention in some departments will depend in large measure on the leadership exerted by the chairman. I am a realist and I do not minimize the problems ahead.

Assumption of responsibility means ultimately that college English departments must find ways of working locally and nationally with all of the individuals and groups that influence the teaching of English—with the 900,000 elementary and secondary teachers of English and with their educational leaders in state and regional associations, such as the 170 regional affiliates of the National Council of Teachers of English. Fortunately the strong participation of college English leaders in the Council and in many of its affiliates make this development less difficult than establishing permanent working relationships with four other types of groups or individuals concerned about the teaching of English, each of which I would like to discuss briefly: the administrators or education generalists, the supervisors, the specialists in some aspect of teaching English, and the English education specialists.

At least three general educational associations are organized nationally to review the needs and problems of particular groups of schools—the National Education Association, the National Catholic Educational Association, and the National Association of Independent Schools, each of which is concerned with curriculum as well as with other educational problems. These associations issue bulletins, prepare recommendations, and strive to improve classroom teaching. The National Education Association, for example, has recently launched a five-year, $500,000 project on the teaching of composition in the high school which calls for the testing of new practices in five high-school centers throughout the East. The National Catholic Educational Association last year appointed a national commission on English to seek solutions for key problems. Whatever college English professors may think about some of the activities of such organizations, their existence and potential influence cannot be ignored.

Working for the improved teaching of English also means working with school principals and superintendents, organized at national and state levels into such associations as the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, and the Department of Elementary School Principals. Through journals and conventions, these groups seek to keep their members balanced in perspective. In some states, such as California, the school administrators actually control the programs for accrediting schools and thus have both the responsibilities and the opportunities involved in evaluating English programs. In most states, and certainly nationally, the administrators are among the more vocal, influential educational leaders.

Working for the improved teaching of English also means working with school supervisors and curriculum consultants, some of whom may be specialists in the teaching of English, but many more generalists attempting to assist teachers in several curricular areas. The supervisor is a key person for it is he, more than anyone else in a school district, who devotes full time and energy to improving instructional programs, to arranging for meetings and seminars for the continuing education of teachers, to assisting in the selection of textbooks that are used, and to supervising most new curriculum development projects in the schools. In fourteen states and in many large city systems, specialists for English supervision work on a full time or almost full time basis. More English specialists will probably be appointed and college departments might profitably assist schools in locating adequately trained persons to fulfill such important roles. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development is the national organization for curriculum specialists; it is organized into state chapters and not infrequently devotes much time at its meetings to analyzing aspects of the English curriculum.

Working for the improved teaching of English means establishing communication with specialists in various aspects of English teaching, such as the 90,000 members of the Association for Childhood Education International, who concentrate on the problems of teaching in primary schools. Or the educational researchers in the National Conference on Research in English, who provide useful annual summaries of research on pedagogical problems in English. Or the members of the International Reading Association—

specialists on the teaching of reading in schools and colleges— now numerically stronger than the Modern Language Association itself and with a momentum for growth that far outstrips that of the National Council. Or especially those in English education or the teaching of English who may hold appointments in English departments, in education, or perhaps joint appointments in both departments, and who stand in many ways between the two departments and need to keep abreast of both.

These are some of the individuals and groups already working to strengthen teaching in this country. They have much to contribute to English as well as much to learn about English, but their attempts to provide a quality education will be immeasurably strengthened by greater support from our college departments. Most of these associations and individuals will welcome advice and assistance from English specialists, whenever such help is offered in a genuinely cooperative way. But the road to achieving strong positive relationships will not be easy. In the process of meeting with these individuals, misunderstandings are likely to arise. A generalist in education, attempting to maintain some familiarity with all areas of learning, quite likely lacks real conversancy with any single one. Quite possibly the school administrator or supervisor will not ever have heard of the more recent developments in rhetoric or language, just as the college English teacher will be unfamiliar with some of the important new pedagogical studies of teaching effectiveness.

Albert H. Marckwardt has reminded us of the problems that we face in bringing college English and college education together when he told the Cooperative English Program, "Most professors of English derive their views of what goes on in Education classes from what amounts to fiction and folklore, just as they derive their notions of present-day elementary and secondary education from their own imperfect memories of their youth and these are sometimes less than accurate accounts. Members of Education faculties have their own mythology about pedagogical ineptitude and lack of realism of the subject-matter people, quite as prejudiced and unreasonable as ours." Certainly patience is required in working toward cooperative action, but a strong foundation can be built. And before college English departments become overly critical of professional workers in other fields, they might well examine the quality of the leadership which college English departments have provided over the years. If principals and superintendents seem not to possess the necessary basic knowledge of recent developments in English, what meetings or conferences have our colleges and universities sponsored to inform these key leaders? If state and large city supervisors of English do not possess exactly the academic qualifications that we deem desirable, what programs of preparation for such instructional supervisors are currently being offered in the universities? If present teachers of English seem not to be well prepared in the subjects they are teaching, what steps are being taken within the departments to make certain that tomorrow's teachers will be better prepared? Or to provide evening or summer courses to assist the teachers already in service?

Honest answers to questions of this kind will lead to a recognition of obligations with which college departments might begin immediately to meet. Certainly the willingness of college English teachers to admit some inadequacies in their own actions offers a welcome way of approaching members of other groups who have not always felt that past overtures to college English departments have been met either with support or with sympathy.

The way in which our college departments, and particularly the college department chairmen, respond to the present crisis in English teaching will determine the direction in which our English curriculum will go. If we wish to move in the direction of strengthening subject matter content, where else but from English departments can we expect our leadership to come? The choice before us seems manifest. I fervently hope that Jerome Bruner is substantially right in suggesting the model of the Nobel laureate as the symbol for what is happening in education today. The magnificent efforts of our colleagues in the sciences and in mathematics are already bearing rich fruit. But as linguist H. A. Gleason said earlier this year, "The real question is whether we can develop a curriculum in English to stand *with* the new programs in mathematics and science—a curriculum worthy of our subject matter and above all a curriculum worthy of the coming generations of young people."[2]

[2] H. A. Gleason, Jr., "What Is English?" *College Composition and Communication*, XIII (October 1962), 10.